

## **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the COURTS OF WALKER, County TEXAS**

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the **Courts of Walker County** will implement the following protective measures:

### **General**

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, including conducting in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding physical distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions within the county.
4. Judges may begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020.

### **Judge and Court Staff Health**

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Upon entering the courthouse, each judge and court staff member will have their temperatures measured. On a daily basis judges shall discuss with court staff and clerks interacting with the court the need for self-monitoring and reporting of any COVID-19 symptoms. Judges and court staff will comply with the health requirements set out in this Plan. Adequate measures have been put in place to protect the income and positions of court staff who may need to be quarantined or work remotely.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.
4. During in-person hearings or dockets, judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice physical distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations. Face coverings may be removed in areas protected by appropriate shielding or when separated from others by six feet. While in chambers and staff work areas common to the court's chambers, masks or face coverings are optional when physical distancing occurs, but must be made available to those who wish to use them.

### **Court Scheduling**

1. Courts holding trials, hearings, and other judicial functions which are located in a building separate from other courtrooms shall establish individual court schedules in keeping with this Plan and the instructions emanating from the Office of Court Administration and the Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.
2. Magistration schedules for conducting inmate magistration at the Walker County Jail shall not be affected by this Plan. Magistrates shall otherwise maintain physical distancing and hygienic procedures during magistration duties.
3. Courtroom schedules currently employed by the District Courts, County Court at Law and Commissioners Court shall remain in place as they are adequate to ensure separation of individuals and reduce populations within the Walker County courthouse.

### **Vulnerable Populations**

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.
2. Each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets, notices, and in other communications notifying individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building (a copy of which is attached).
3. Attorneys and unrepresented parties shall provide the Notice to Vulnerable Populations to any participants they plan to have attend the proceeding.
4. Except for specific legal requirements vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by being given an opportunity to appear by teleconference, to submit necessary information in written format when allowed by the existing law or by rescheduling of the in-person hearing until a time after the crisis has diminished.

### **Physical Distancing**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate physical distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. No more than two individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator.
3. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure physical distancing and the maximum capacity has been posted on each restroom door.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms, have been closed to the public.

### *Gallery*

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate physical distancing in the seating.

### *Well*

7. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is physical distancing of at least 6 feet between each space or appropriate shielding.

### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each courtroom, and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and in the hallways.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

### **Screening**

1. Notices will be placed at the entrance to each courthouse or courtroom containing questions concerning COVID-19 symptoms and COVID-19 contacts. When possible, Courthouse Security Personnel will ask individuals attempting to enter the court building if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.
2. When possible, Courthouse Security personnel will determine the temperature of the individual attempting to enter the courthouse or courtroom. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks, gloves, and if requested, vison or safety glasses.

**Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times. Face coverings may be removed when participating in official proceedings so long as there is appropriate shielding or physical distancing of 6 feet.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks or N95 compatible masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.

**Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least once each work day.
2. Court building cleaning staff will wipe down contact areas and, as needed clean courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

**Other**

1. Any of the trial courts of Walker County may take any other reasonable action necessary to avoid exposing court proceedings to the threat of COVID-19.
2. This Order may be extended or modified by written Order of this Court without notice. Any such extension or modification shall be delivered to all trial judges of Walker County, the County Clerk, the District Clerk, posted with the District Clerk of Walker County, and posted on the Court's website.

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in Walker County regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and county judge of Walker County, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date:

26 May 20

Donald Kraemer

Walker County Local Administrative District Judge

Allen Anderson 5/27/2020

## OFFICE OF THE COUNTY JUDGE

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DANNY PIERCE  
Walker County Judge  
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1100 University Avenue  
Huntsville, Texas 77340

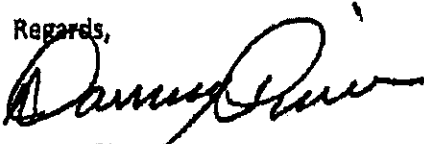
May 26, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I have met with Walker County's Local Administrative District Judge Donald Kraemer and Walker County's Local Health Authority to discuss the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Courts of Walker County. I am in agreement with the plan as outlined and this plan has my full support.

The Walker County Courthouse has been following similar guidelines that are set forth in the proposed plan and I believe any adjustments will be easy to implement.

Regards,



Danny Pierce  
County Judge  
Walker County

Independent Clinic of Texas

Darrel Wells, MD

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Huntsville, Texas 77320

Office: 936-295-8392 Fax: 936-295-8395

May 21, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Per review of COVID-19 Operating Plan the Courts of Walker County, Texas, I agree with the plan as written especially including provision for appropriate modification as needed by written Order of the Court without notice.

I will be available for consultation and/or advice as needed.

Sincerely,

Darrel Wells MD

Local Health Authority

Walker County, Texas

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